PREVIOUSLY

There are some places you just don't mess with. Wakanda is one of them. Since the dawn of time, that African warrior nation has been sending would-be conquerors home in body bags. While the rest of Africa got carved up like a Christmas turkey by the rest of the world, Wakanda's cultural evolution has gone unchecked for centuries, unfettered by the yoke of colonization. The result: A hi-tech, resource-rich, ecologically-sound paradise that makes the rest of the world seem primitive by comparison.

Ruling over all this is T'Challa, the heir to the centuries-old warrior cult that's served as Wakanda's religious, political and military head since its inception: The Black Panther. Anyone who'd dare to make a move on Wakanda must go through him.

After the fall of its corrupt leader, Prime Minister M'Butu, Wakanda's neighboring country, Niganda, has descended even deeper into chaos and political unrule. In this vacuum, many of the nation's unsavory secrets have begun to boil to the surface--including the appearance of strange creatures with special genetic gifts. The X-Men head to Niganda to investigate...only to find the Black Panther at the heart of the secret installation's stronghold...

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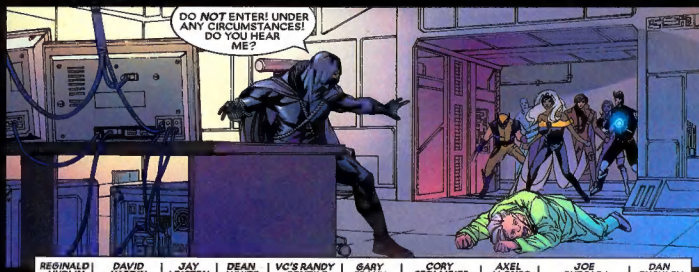
wild kingdom part two

House of Paine



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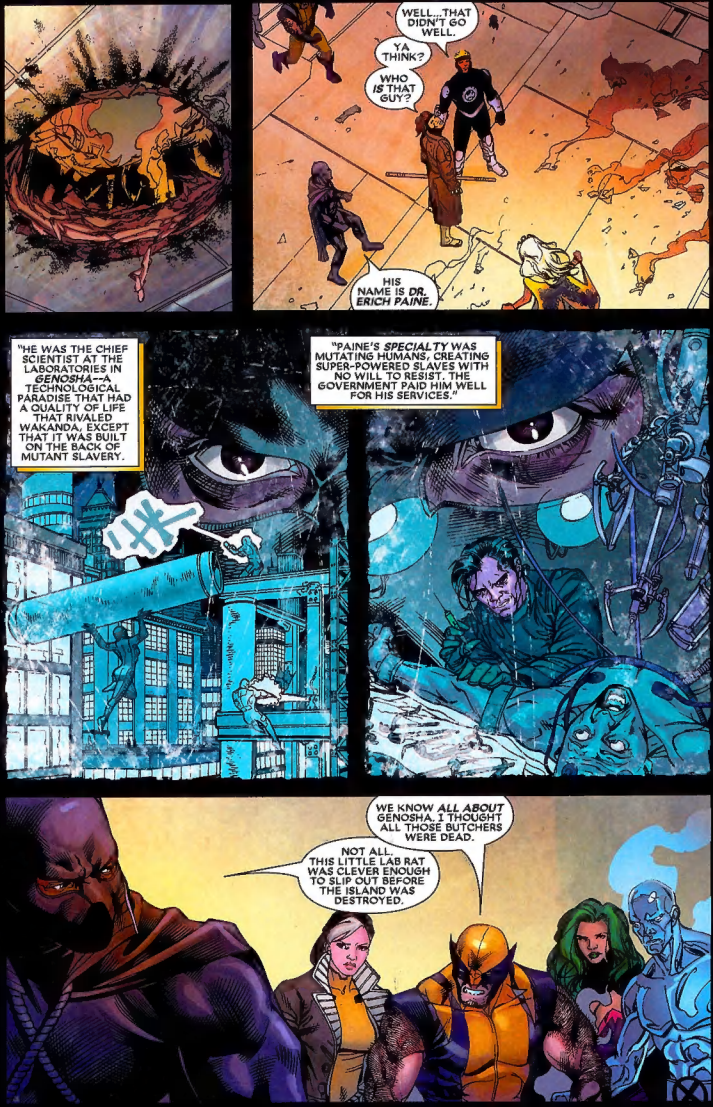
TH-THANK GOD...HELP ME!
HE'S GONE MAD! CREATING MONSTERS!
YOU'VE GOT TO--
OH NO YOU DON'T!
BAM!
HEY!

WHAK
THUD
WHUMP
OUCH!
THAT'S GOTTA HURT!
UHM. WHO'S THE BAD GUY HERE?
GOOD QUESTION. WHY IS THE PANTHER BEATING THE STUFFING OUT OF PENCIL-NECK IN THERE?
IT DOESN'T LOOK RIGHT. WE'D BETTER--
HAVOK, WAIT. I KNOW T'CHALLA. I TRUST HIM.
WELL, I'M THE COMMANDER OF THIS TEAM, AND I'M CALLING IT.
OPEN IT UP, ROGUE!
SURE THANG, SUGAH!
YOU KNOW, I COULD'VE DONE THAT CLEANER.

FOOLS! STAND BACK! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE--
YOU STAND DOWN, PANTHER. WE NEED SOME ANSWERS.
WE CAN DO THIS THE EASY WAY...
...OR THE NOT-SO-EASY WAY.
I DON'T WANT TO HURT YOU--
--BUT THIS IS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.
WHOA-- FAST!
WHAP!

ARE YOU OKAY...?
NO! GET AWAY FROM HIM--
WHUMP
STOP RIGHT THERE, CATMAN!
WHAT THE--!
HOW IRONIC THAT YOU WOULD BE MY FIRST VICTIM.
HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU DONE THIS TO OTHER MUTANTS?
I'D BEAT YOU TO DEATH FOR WHAT YOU DID TO ME, T'CHALLA--
--BUT I HAVE MORE PRESSING CONCERNS.

THAT'S IT--FIGHT BACK! THIS IS GREAT!
YEAH?
HOW'S *THIS* FEEL?


WELL...THAT DIDN'T GO WELL.
YA THINK?
WHO *IS* THAT GUY?
HIS NAME IS *DR. ERICH PAINE.*
"HE WAS THE CHIEF SCIENTIST AT THE LABORATORIES IN *GENOSHA*—A TECHNOLOGICAL PARADISE THAT HAD A QUALITY OF LIFE THAT RIVALED WAKANDA, EXCEPT THAT IT WAS BUILT ON THE BACK OF MUTANT SLAVERY.
"PAINE'S *SPECIALTY* WAS MUTATING HUMANS, CREATING SUPER-POWERED SLAVES WITH NO WILL TO RESIST. THE GOVERNMENT PAID HIM WELL FOR HIS SERVICES."
WE KNOW *ALL ABOUT* GENOSHA. I THOUGHT ALL THOSE BUTCHERS WERE DEAD.
NOT ALL. THIS LITTLE LAB RAT WAS CLEVER ENOUGH TO SLIP OUT BEFORE THE ISLAND WAS DESTROYED.

"DR. PAINE SET UP SHOP HERE IN NIGANDA, WHERE A LARGE GOVERNMENT BRIBE BOUGHT HIM THE FREEDOM TO DO HIS EXPERIMENTS REGARDLESS OF HUMAN OR ENVIRONMENTAL COST.
"JUST THE RUNOFFS FROM HIS FACTORY ALONE POLLUTED THE WATER TABLE OF THE COUNTRY WITH DANGEROUS CHEMICALS."
BECAUSE WAKANDA HAS A STRICT NON-INTERVENTION POLICY, WE COULDN'T DO ANYTHING UNTIL NIGANDA ATTEMPTED TO ANNEX WAKANDA.* WE THEN REMOVED M'BUTU FROM POWER AND TOOK ACTION AGAINST THIS FACILITY.
"REMOVE M'BUTU"...I HEARD YOU STARTED BY REMOVING HIS TEETH ONE PUNCH AT A TIME.
*SEE BLACK PANTHER #1-6 –EDITOR
"HE THREATENED MY COUNTRY AND MY FAMILY, ORORO. HE DIDN'T LEAVE ME WITH A LOT OF CHOICE.
"ONCE WAR BROKE OUT, THE COUNTRY'S POWER GRID QUICKLY FAILED. BEFORE THE FACTORY'S BACKUP POWER GENERATORS KICKED IN, SOME OF PAINE'S CREATIONS GOT LOOSE AND STARTED EATING PEOPLE."

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE *REAL* THREAT HERE? HOW DID THE GEEK BECOME A *MUTANT?*
PAINE KNEW THE X-MEN WOULD COME FOR HIM SOONER OR LATER...
"...SO HE TOOK CERTAIN PRECAUTIONS. HE BUILT A LATENT MIMICKING ABILITY INTO HIS OWN SYSTEM THAT HE COULD TRIGGER ON TOUCH."
I WAS TRYING TO FIND A *CONTAINMENT SUIT* SO HE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO TOUCH ANY OF YOU WHEN YOU CAME BARGING IN.
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL US ALL OF THIS?
WHY DIDN'T YOU HAVE YOUR TELEPATH READ MY INTENTIONS?
BECAUSE SHE DECIDED TO STAY BACK AT THE BASE.
I SEE... THAT'S QUITE A DISADVANTAGE.
OKAY, POINT MADE, EVERYONE...
WHY ARE WE STANDING AROUND TALKING WHEN THIS PSYCHO IS STILL ON THE LOOSE?
MAY I SUGGEST THAT ONLY TEAM MEMBERS WHO HAVE ALREADY HAD THEIR POWERS ABSORBED BY DR. PAINE PURSUE HIM; THAT WOULD LIMIT THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS GETTING MORE POWERS.
STORM, IN PARTICULAR, IS NEEDED ELSEWHERE. SHE'S THE MOST APPROPRIATE PERSON TO SQUELCH THE RIOTING OUTSIDE.
LOOK, BUB, I KNOW YOU'RE TRYING TO HELP, BUT *WE'LL* DECIDE HOW TO DEPLOY OUR MEMBERS.
IT WAS ONLY A SUGGESTION.

I'LL KEEP GOING THROUGH HIS RESEARCH TO SEE IF THERE IS ANY KIND OF DEACTIVATION SWITCH FOR THE MONSTERS ON THE LOOSE.
I HAVEN'T SECURED THIS FACILITY ENOUGH TO ALLOW MY SCIENTISTS TO COME IN HERE AND HELP ME GO THROUGH THE FILES TO SEE IF THESE CREATURES HAVE "OFF" SWITCHES. DO ANY OF YOU HAVE ADVANCED COMPUTER SKILLS, OR EXPERTISE IN GENETICS OR PHYSIOLOGY?
NO, WE DON'T HAVE ANYONE LIKE THAT ON THIS TEAM, EITHER.
I WAS HOPING THE BEAST OR SHADOWCAT MIGHT BE....
STORM, WHY DON'T YOU STAY WITH THE PANTHER, SINCE THAT PROBABLY WAS WHAT YOU WERE GOING TO DO ANYWAY. GAMBIT, POLARIS, YOU'RE COMING WITH US.
WELL, HE CERTAINLY SHOWED ME WHO'S BOSS!
WHERE ARE THE REAL X-MEN?
SSSSHHH! THOSE ARE MY FRIENDS! AND GOOD PEOPLE!
AND THE TROLL--WOLVERINE--IS HE YOUR BOYFRIEND?
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
PLEASE... I CAN SMELL HIS PASSION FOR YOU.
AND HOW MANY WOMEN ARE IN YOUR HAREM THESE DAYS, KING T'CHALLA?

I'VE BEEN A MONK, WAITING FOR YOUR RETURN.
DO NOT START WITH ME! I HAVE AVOIDED THIS ENTIRE CONTINENT BECAUSE OF YOU, AND YOU'RE ABOUT TO REMIND ME WHY!
FINE THEN. YOU HANDLE YOUR BUSINESS, AND I'LL HANDLE *MINE*.
AGREED.
JUST REMEMBER: THEY DON'T CARE ABOUT X-MEN. THEY NEED A *GODDESS*.
YOU ARE WISE, T'CHALLA...
...BUT YOU WILL NOT BREAK MY HEART A SECOND TIME!

I HAVEN'T FELT THAT STUPID SINCE I FIRST MET XAVIER.
I DON'T THINK THE PANTHER LIKES MUTANTS.
HE CERTAINLY LIKES STORM. I COULD SMELL IT.
:SNIFF: SPEAKING OF SMELL, THERE'S SOMETHING GOING ON IN THIS HALLWAY. GAS.
BOBBY, ICE ALL THE VENTS.
I'M ON IT! THIS IS A LONG HALLWAY, IT MIGHT TAKE A MIN--
FFFFFFZZZZZAT
AAARGH!
ZZZZZ

I'M ON IT!
KA-THRAAK!
I GOT THE LAST ONE, MES AMIS.
SKKKROW!
FFSSSSSSS
YOU HIT THE GAS PIPE, GAMBIT! -COUGH- NOW IT'S PUMPING IN HARD!
PEE-YEW! THIS MUST BE FOR...ELEPHANTS... GOTTA CALL STORM BEFORE I--
THRUMP!
URGHK!

WOW. THESE ARE NICE!

MEANWHILE...
TRAITORS! DON'T THINK YOU CAN HIDE!
YOUR DEATH WILL BE QUICK IF YOU DON'T MAKE US CHASE YOU!
GRRRRR
GRRRRR
MOMMY...
GRRRRR
GRRRRRAAAAWWL
WITCHES! GET THEM!
THEY BROUGHT THE MONSTERS TO THIS LAND!
WHAT--? IT WAS A CLEAR SKY A MINUTE AGO.
I TOLD YOU THEY WERE ENCHANTERS!

WAIT! WHAT'RE YOU DOING? I NEED THE LITTLE ONE TO CURE MY AFFLICTION. VIRGINS CURE AIDS!
TOO LATE NOW. WE'LL FIND YOU ANOTHER.
GRRRRRWWWWL
GRRRRRWWWWL
YIPE

STAND BACK! THE GODDESS OF THE DESERT HAS RETURNED!
THIS MOTHER AND CHILD ARE UNDER MY PROTECTION!
I WILL DESTROY ANY MAN WHO TOUCHES THEM!

WE ARE NOT SCARED OF YOUR SORCERY!
YOU MAY BE A GHOST, BUT WE'LL CUT YOU ALL THE SAME!
CUT ME? WITH WHAT?
KRAK-KOOM
SO... DOES ANYONE ELSE WANT TO RAPE AND MURDER? RAISE YOUR WEAPON TO ME AND SEE WHAT KIND OF MAN YOU *REALLY* ARE.

YOUR MAJESTY, WHY DON'T YOU JUST LET US HACK INTO HIS SYSTEM REMOTELY?
GIVEN THE NUMBER OF BOOBY TRAPS I'VE HAD TO DISARM JUST TO GET THIS FAR, I DON'T WANT TO RISK INFECTING THE WAKANDAN COMPUTER SYSTEMS WITH SOME NASTY VIRUS.
THEN WE CAN SEND IN A SQUADRON TO HELP SECURE THE--
SSSSSH. I HEAR SOMETHING.
I SMELL SOMETHING, TOO...
WHO--?

OMF!
NOW THAT'S A LOT OF GORILLA!
SMASH
BABOONS! I HATE BABOONS!

OH YEAH? WELL, WE HATE YOU, TOO!
YOU--URNF--TALK?
OH, AND A LOT MORE THAN THAT. LOOK INTO MY EYES....LOOK...
THAT'S IT...
HOLD HIM STEADY...

...YES, YOUR ORDER IS READY. JUST WIRE THE FINAL PAYMENT AND IT WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PICKUP.
OF COURSE, WORK IS GUARANTEED. BUT NO RETURNS ONCE IT LEAVES THE PREMISES.
YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN SOME *NEW ITEMS* I JUST ACQUIRED. THEY ARE AVAILABLE AS SINGLES, A COMPLETE SET...
...OR IN *PARTS.*
BZZZZZZZ!!!
TO BE CONTINUED IN X-MEN #176.

MAIL TO THE KING!

Mail to the King,

I was a little suspicious of the new run on BLACK PANTHER. I really enjoyed Priest's run on the book and felt very let down when it got cancelled. When I saw the new PANTHER #1 on the shelf, I had much inner debate. I was still upset that the Priest run was over and even more upset that Marvel would use a top-notch penciler like Romita on a new run when the Priest run was given decent, but not superstar pencilers.

Who the heck was Hudlin? Does this guy really think he can pick up the pieces after Priest? Yes, he can.

This book is stellar. I like it just as much as I liked the Priest stuff and that is a *huge* compliment. The storyline is everything that BLACK PANTHER deserves and the art is fantastic. I especially liked Dodson's cover on #5! Great looking cover!

I've seen in the letters page some debate on the Panther beats Cap issue—tough call. I guess since it was 1944 and Cap still lacked some experience, Panther could pull that off. Panther against modern Cap? Panther is destined for a beat-down. But that brings up a whole new point: Why is Black Panther ALWAYS at odds with other Marvel super heroes? Can't they ever just team up and fight evil? It seems that in a quest to make Panther a tough, noble character a lot of writers (including Priest) have just made him a jerk. They also make Wakanda out to be a perfect government and the USA little more than a bigger, more evil form of Hydra or something. Angst and tension are good in comics, but can we lighten up just a little?

Overall, this book is a solid "A". Keep up the great work!

Capt. Jarrod "J-Bone" Alberich, USAF
Lackland AFB, TX

Capt. J-Bone, I don't know that I can agree with you on the 1998 BLACK PANTHER series not having "superstar pencilers." Mark Texeira's work, not to mention his profile, with Priest was huge! Being a founding Marvel Knights title is no small shakes either. All debate aside, we're glad to hear you feel we're doing a "A"-rate job at maintaining the high standard PANTHER teams past have set.

Cap vs. Panther? Debate on all you like. My money's still on T'Challa all the way. Fighting skill + tech beats fighting skill alone.

Will we lighten up? Sure, we'll have full-on fight issues like last month's "Soul Power in the House of M", but what we're out to deliver to fans every month in BLACK PANTHER is a challenging read. A book that's about more than the comic book stories that preceded it and that's relevant to the conflicts in the world around us.

Wow, I haven't written a letter to Marvel since THOR #50, this is fun!

It's taken me five issues to be able to rightfully say that I have jumped on the Black Panther bandwagon. The first four issues were all average to good, but nothing grabbed my attention so much that I felt the need to follow the book past the conclusion of the first storyline. But the fifth issue was different, there was more urgency here, I cared more about the characters and their plight, and despite the routine cliffhanger I am looking forward to the final chapter and beyond.

Wakanda is under attack by a group of baddies brought together by the nefarious Klaw. Now Black Panther and his army must combat the villains and restore balance to Wakanda, and do it before America sends "aid" into the country (i.e. hostile takeover under the guise of best intentions). Phew.

Hudlin lets completely loose with the action sequences, dreaming up original exciting comic passages. Of special note is a jaw-dropping confrontation between Black Panther and Black Knight that is fast-paced, beautifully dialogued (is that a word?) and excellently illustrated.

While most all-action issues of comics are easily disposable as far as character interaction, I was surprised to find that the best character moments in the series so far are found here. More so than ever before you get insight into who these characters are and what they are about.

I do have some qualms. *The Pirates of the Caribbean* rip-off supersoldiers America is using to infiltrate Wakanda doesn't work, and the cliffhanger is merely average where the rest of the issue fired on all cylinders. In fact, the biggest problem with the series so far has been the lack of quality cliffhangers. I'm thinking back, and while I can remember certain moments from every issue, I cannot remember any of the cliffhangers.

While John Romita Jr.'s artwork often fell flat in the earlier issues due to lack of action and the need for lots of subtlety here it rocks, plain and simple. All of the dynamic action stuff Romita is known for has come out in spades, and Klaus Janson's inking style underlines all the strength in Romita's pencilling. Of special note are Dean White's colors, which underline the suspense and characterization perfectly, why isn't this guy coloring more books?

If the finale is of the same quality as this issue I just might buy that hardcover edition when it hits stands this fall, and I recommend you do as well. As a monthly series BLACK PANTHER sometimes falls flat, but I have a feeling that if it were read all in one sitting all of its qualities would be underlined and it would make for a fantastic read.

Robert Taylor
Akron, Ohio

You can look forward to the "WHO IS THE BLACK PANTHER?" hardcover at a comic shop near you on September 28th! It's chock full of behind-the-scenes bonuses including Reggie's original mission statement for BLACK PANTHER, sketches by John Romita, Jr., Esad Ribic and Kaare Andrews.

Wow. Wow. A skybike. I am 13 and BLACK PANTHER #5 was the first comic I've read in 5 years. I was hooked instantly. And after seeing the skybike I was at a loss for words. This is the best title I'm reading. I first told myself that too much story was bad but you guys proved me wrong. Klaw is just so sinister. Black Knight on his horse vs. Black Panther on the skybike was genius. Never let Marvel change the writer, Hudlin is perfect. Because of his writing, I was inspired to start writing. Keep up the good work. Hey I almost forgot, SOLAR POWERED ZOMBIES!!!

Nick Bush
Pikesville, MD

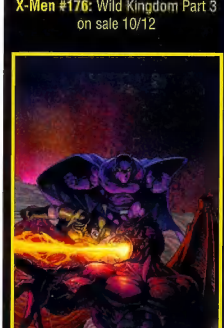
Hey, Nick! Glad we got your attention. Skybikes, do, in fact, rule. HOWEVER! No matter how cool skybikes may be, you're right, solar powered zombies are juuuuuuust about the coolest thing since ice met cream.

That's all for this month, folks. Catch us for Part Three of "Wild Kingdom" in X-Men #176 and then back here in the pages of PANTHER #9 for the action-packed conclusion!

—Cory

Next month, the Black Panther & the X-Men in a story so big it took two titles to tell it!

X-Men #176: Wild Kingdom Part 3 on sale 10/12



Black Panther #9: Wild Kingdom Part 4, on sale 10/26

NEXT ISSUE:

More Panther!
More X-Men!
More Giant Apes!
'Nuff Said!

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